DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 175 EA 012 927

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TITLE In-Service Programs That Improve Staff Performance.
PUB DATE 9 Apr 80
NOTE 16p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Boards Association (40th, San Francisco, CA, April 19-22, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education: *Inservice Teacher Education: *Program Development: *Staff Develcpment: *Teacher Improvement

ABSTRACT

A dozen suggestions tc improve school district inservice programs are made. (1) Bring a university program to the district: the teachers and administrators who participate will pay for it and earn college credits on their own time. (2) Be sure to provide some time for people to meet by grade level or subject area. (3) Use teachers as presenters and consultants. (4) Use a consortium approach with other districts of similar size to bring in some top people for excellent programs. (5) Have orientation programs for new teachers that help them assimilate the school's values. (6) Think about sending some of the people who have demonstrated a capacity for positive influence on their colleagues to conventions. (7) Observe practices in other classrooms and other schools. (8) Focus on subject matter. (9) Occasionally focus on teaching as a subject. (10) Encourage reading of professional journals. (11) Consider administrator inservice programs as opportunities to improve instruction by developing administrators into skilled observers and evaluators of teachers. (12) Get the board of education involved. (Author/MLF)

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1980 NSBA CONVENTION/SAN FRANCISCO APRIL 19-22 1980
SPEAKER Spreen CLINIC NO D-55

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# IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS THAT IMPROVE STAFF PERFORMANCE

William E. Spreen

Last November, when I received the invitation to participate in today's clinic, I was struck by the title. It makes it sound as if it would be possible for my co-presenter, Mr.Weinhardt and me to rattle off in less than an hour some surefire ideas that would guarantee success when you return to your school districts properly inspired by this over-all in-service activity known as the 40th Annual Convention and Exposition of The National School Boards Association. And I am most certain that all of you are here for that purpose alone, not just because the meeting happens to be in San Francisco. On second thought, I am not a hundred percent certain about that but I am confident that your being here at 9:00 a.m. is a demonstration of sincerity.

I will give you one guarantee regarding in-service programs of all kinds. But I am saving that until the very end. What I will try to do between now and then is share an even dozen suggestions for your consideration. I will also briefly address several general concerns about in-service.

As I began my thinking about this presentation, an incident came to mind which I would like to share with you. Several years ago, we announced a program to be conducted by a college professor on site, that is, in the district. The format was to allow small groups of interested teachers to join together to develop some curricular and instructional ideas pursuing their own particular jobs and interests. One teacher, a good one at that, shot a question at the college professor: "I took a course from your department once before and it was a waste of time, how may I be sure that the same thing won't happen again?" Taken back, the professor stammered

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around a bit finally saying something to the effect that he was confident the same thing would not happen again and that, after all, you are not here to take lessons from me but to work with others in giving substance to some of your own ideas. Unfortunately, the teacher was relentless and pursued her original line of questioning to the point of embarrassment. It finally occurred to me, and I hope it has already occurred to you, that there was a teacher missing a most fundamental educational principal: what you get out of in-service, or anything else for that matter, is a direct reflection of what you put into it. So, it's the attitude of approach that usually is the critical factor.

On a rainy day in Florida during spring vacation I was reduced to browsing in a typical tourist shop. There was an amusing gorilla poster which said "I like your approach, now let me see your departure." Of course, coming to in-service with the right approach will not assure a satisfied departure. What happens in between has a lot to do with that so I would like to begin sharing some specific ideas.

My opening remarks have already identified idea Number One. That is, bring a university program to your district. Let your teachers save time and energy while the professor spends his money for gas. This can be a great convenience for staff members and you can count on the fact that there are plenty of college professors anxious to do this sort of thing as college departments of education begin to come smack up against severe enrollment decline. The teachers and administrators who participate in such in-service pay for it as they earn college credits and they do it on their own time. Naturally, this idea has limited application and is best suited if your district is large enough to be able to generate a

full class. This is an especially helpful approach when you are introducing a major new program or approach that cuts across grade levels or subject areas.

As I proceed, I feel compelled to announce that my approach will be pragmatic, that of a practitioner rather than a researcher. By that, I do not mean to disparage research and I will speak later to an idea for some local research which is practical and valuable to continuing efforts to provide effective in-service. My first eleven years in education were in a large city district in which my involvement was that of a partaker only, not a planner. I began to become involved as a high school principal in a district which was into some pretty good ideas. Then, as an assistant superintendent in a larger district, I arrived on the scene when the district changed from a calendar which allowed no time for in-service to one which provided three full days of activity. Now, as a superintendent, my biggest worry is how to pay for some of the in-service activities which we sponsor in our district.

In the district in which I served as assistant superintendent, the district which went from no time for in-service to three days, the teachers had pushed hard for in-service opportunities. Although I am proud of our record of success in maintaining positive attitudes about in-service, it did become amusing as a few teachers turned from a demand for in-service time to griping about the extended school calendar and "wasting"time on in-service.

My wife is still employed as a kindergarten teacher by the district in which I was assistant superintendent. Don't worry, it was ethical - she was already there before I got there, so she had seniority and I had the rank. Unfortunately, at home, it seems that I have neither. She

probably complained more about in-service than any of the teachers or principals with whom I worked and her complaint was usually in the vein that the in-service exercise, whatever it was, wound up not really being appropriate to kindergarten teachers and that what she and the other kindergarten teachers wanted, more than anything else, was to have an occasional opportunity to talk business with one another. Experience has demonstrated, time and time again, that her point is well taken so suggestion Number Two is that however you structure your in-service efforts, be sure to provide some time for people to meet by grade level or subject area. I don't mean that that should be a two or three hour block of time for random discussion. With planning and modest direction, the exchanging and sharing of ideas and concerns among the teachers themselves is not only sought after, it is appreciated and productive.

The approach just described brings me quickly to suggestion Number Three: Use teachers as presenters and consultants. Teachers from within the district or from without are often capable of providing some of the best in-service programming you can develop. So often, an idea presented by a professor or an administrator quickly generates skepticism in the hearer. The classroom teacher begins to think "that's a good idea in theory but it just won't go in my classroom". The same idea, being presented by a teacher who is successfully and happily doing what he or she is talking about is well received. That's a principle which I am sure we as board members and administrators quickly acknowledge although we sometimes forget it. There is a side benefit here too in that teachers who are asked to participate get a morale boost. They may not get a penny more than Mr. Weinhardt and I are receiving today but they, like we, enjoy the thought that they may be helping someone else.

When I worked as a high school principal, I was in a district of modest size. We were able to afford a few speakers who could address an entire staff, K through 12, and leave them all satisfied. Such speakers are rare, so rare in fact, that I am not offering that approach as one of my suggestions. Because of our size, it was difficult to provide the more specialized opportunities required for the high school departments or specific grade levels. Therefore, we became involved in what I still consider a promising approach and offer to you as suggestion Number Four - a consortium approach.

Along with four other districts of similar size and makeup, we were able to bring in some top people for excellent programs in high school subject areas or primary or intermediate instruction. These opportunities were also great in terms of cross-pollination, for avoidance of becoming inbred to excess.

Often, these programs were for an entire school day and that leads me to express one caution: be careful before taking away instructional time. All of us already experience real problems with time away from task. As a principal, I was greatly concerned about that and also the fact that on those days when entire departments were out of the building, we set up a situation which practically invited students to skip classes and get into other sorts of trouble. Administratively, we had to spend a lot of time resolving problems that would never have come up if the regular teachers had not been absent. Today, many districts are experiencing severe shortages of competent substitutes. That makes my concern and caution even more emphatic.

Here is idea Number Five which is so basic that it is often overlooked: the orientation of new teachers. As I say that, I can just feel the defensiveness out there, to a person you are probably thinking, "Well of

course we have orientation for new teachers!" And I am sure you do. Let me get to the point by asking a question: How much of that orientation goes beyond those initial meetings of getting acquainted with so and so or personnel policies 1,001 through XYZ, and filling out necessary forms? Is time given to working with new teachers on a continuing basis on some things that really count? Does anyone really get in there and talk with new teachers, or old teachers new to the district, about what commitment to teaching really means? About empathy and rapport with students and individualizing concerns for students as people as opposed to merely being a teacher of subjects? These are some things that we have tackled in our district and yes, they don't work perfectly but we have been pleased that after a year, most of our new staff members have really begun to assimilate values which we regard just as highly as proficiency in reading instruction in the primary grades or perfect pronunciation in the foreign languages.

Well, here we are in San Francisco and most of us are enjoying the city as much as the convention. I don't offer that as a critical statement. I believe there is a value which accrues from these experiences, indeed, they may brighten up some difficult times for us and often we go home enthused and in possession of a couple of ideas that may mean a great deal for our school districts. This does bring me to suggestion Number Six which on the face may seem to contradict my concern about paying for in-service and taking too much time away from task, but nevertheless here goes. We need to make experiences like this available to at least a few of our teachers. Obviously, we can't afford to send everyone, even to summer conferences when schools are not in session. However, we ought to be thinking about sending some of the people who have really demonstrated a capacity for positive influence with their colleagues.

Indeed, these people may come back and be the teacher consultants and presenters I spoke of in suggestion Number Three. I am sure that all of us face the problem of limited resources to do this sort of thing for very many staff members but we surely ought to be taking greater advantage of them when t hey are in state and close to home. These opportunities can be morale boosting and professionally exciting. They ought not belong just to administrators and board members.

By the way, if you question that observation, let me call your attention to a finding of the "Journal Ballot Box", a regular feature of the American School Board Journal. In February, it reported that school board members should not be shy about attending conventions and that a majority agree that trips to national and state conventions can make board members more effective school leaders. Only four percent of the respondents said that these conventions are unlikely to help them in any concrete way. The old admonition applies, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Suggestion Number Seven is another oldie but not necessarily a "goodie" unless it is carefully thought out in advance. Observation of practices in other classrooms and other schools still has the potential of being helpful. This helpfulness may occur through the process of addition or subtraction in that some good ideas and practices are spotted which may prove to be useful or some not so good practices and conditions are identified and eliminated from further consideration thus avoiding the mistakes of others. This point applies to almost anything you might go to observe whether it is a method of instruction, a new instructional program, or a facility. As a high school principal, I visited a few places that were supposed to be <u>the tops</u> in program and design. When the new high school was built, we avoided some of the pitfalls others had

experienced. Of course, we probably discovered a few new ones of our own but I left and really don't know what they were.

As a member of the Council for Basic Education, I recently received an interesting pamphlet entitled, "Education's Stepchild, In-service Training" by Peter Greer, Superintendent of Schools in Portland, Maine. Mr. Greer, if you are present today, I'd like to assure you that I thought highly of your paper and to let you know that any similarity of suggestions that both of us make are the result of similarities of experience, not plagarism. I agree wholeheartedly with Mr. Greer on what I now introduce as suggestion Number Eight, focus on subject matter. It is true that much in-service effort wanders from this focus to issues that are at best modestly related. In vogue today are such topics as "Teacher Burnout" or "Teacher Stress". It is not that they are bad to think about but rather that too often we stray from our primary purposes of teaching and learning. In our school district today we give considerable attention to curriculum development and we involve teachers as the heart of the process.

Again, it is true, there is time away from task and expense but we justify that by looking to what we regard as a greater good: a product much more likely to be used than shelved. If you are looking for in-service to improve instruction, there can hardly be a better approach even though we seldom call it in-service. But really, that's what it is. It is teachers reading and evaluating up-to-date materials and having significant dialogue with their own peers on what ought to be taught and how.

Mr. Greer identified three touchstones, measures of successful in-service programs. Quickly, they are building the teacher's grasp of subject, the strength that comes from follow-through, and clarity of goals followed promptly by evaluation. I can't quarrel with those observations one bit

except that I would expand his first point. That leads me to suggestion Number Nine.

I believe that it is just as appropriate for in-service to occasionally focus on teaching as on subject. Unless one accepts the premise that teachers are born period, then there is work to be done to develop the skills teachers use to help children learn. I really don't think I need to spend much time though trying to convince you why I think in-service on teaching is appropriate. We could probably pause here and swap horror stories from high school and college on teachers and professors who really knew their subjects but couldn't manage a class or get a darn thing across.

As I introduce suggestion Number Ten which has to do with professional reading, I need to insert a flashback to Number Six., Attending Conventions. I have often said that just about everything you hear at a convention could be read and studied in greater depth and detail at home. It is the experience of the convention or clinic that gives it its special dimension. But professional reading is too often slighted in the press of day to day activity. That statement is just as true for teachers as it is for board members and administrators. My suggestion here is that we need to do more to provide and encourage professional reading.

Too many of us, administrators and board members, leave it to the NEA and the AFT to provide the so-called professional journals that our teachers read. I don't mean that these journals fail to carry some truly helpful articles but for obvious reasons, these articles are often second in position to stories that recount union victories and gains for teachers.

Few of us have ever seen, let alone read, the professional association journals in the specialized fields. We should. And professional reading can and should go well beyond journals which are specific to subject and

pedagogy. For instance, you might be amazed at how apropos some of the articles in the Harvard Business Review are to those of us in education, teachers or managers. The encouragement of professional reading never has been or ever will be an easy task. All of us need to do more to encourage it and probably need to do more ourselves.

I wonder how many administrators attending this convention began their administrative assignments with a pitiful little amount of knowledge about observing and evaluating teachers. If you are committed to in-service that improves instruction, there is no way that you cannot be committed to developing administrative effectiveness in the observation and evaluation of teaching. If a teacher can enter a classroom, close the door and do whatever he or she wishes with curriculum and method, how can we ever see to the improvement of instruction. I hope you are saying that you don't tolerate a lack of observation and evaluation in your school district and I hope for the sake of the boys and girls in your district that you are right.

We have all known for a long time that we can't count on teachers' colleges to guarantee us effective teachers and even if that guarantee could become effective today, so many of us are hiring so few new teachers that it would take years to make a difference. We must make a difference in instruction by what we do in observation and evaluation. My Eleventh suggestion then is to consider the in-service programs of administrators as opportunities to improve instruction by developing them as skilled observers and evaluators of teachers. If there is one in-service program in a school district that deserves continuing effort and follow-through, this is it. It doesn't mean that all administrators in your district go marching lockstep through a given program, but it does mean that all of us had best be sure that administrators are getting some intensive in-service

opportunities to develop these skills. These opportunities may be local workshops, they may be programs of the National Academy for School Executives or they may be one of several programs sponsored by nonpublic training and consultant firms. If you wish to disregard the previous ten suggestions, at least take this one home and get started.

Finally, we come to suggestion Number Twelve: get the board of education involved! If the board is not thinking about and committed to the improvement of instruction, all of the in-service ideas that could ever be mentioned will be to little avail. Board members need to read and hear about what is happening in the district's curriculum. Many boards have already adopted good practice and feature curriculum reports as the first business of the board meeting. In my state, the Ohio School Boards Association and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators jointly sponsor a Spring Academy which usually focuses on instructional issues. Just a few weeks ago some five hundred board members and administrators spent a whole day hearing and thinking about competency based education. Unfortunately, this type of programming is not attended nearly as well as the big meetings where we have the opportunity to look at things and taste the samples.

The importance of the board's role in setting the stage for in-service that improves instruction cannot be overstated. I have now touched upon twelve suggestions, each one of which could stand alone as a topic for full exposition. Neither our time nor our endurance would permit such an approach this morning, and so as I have worked through these twelve suggestions, I have had to leave more unsaid than I'd like. Nevertheless, I hope that at least a few of them offer some points of departure as you return to your district committed to the improvement of in-service programs.

Now that I have identified and briefly reviewed the dozen in-service

ideas, I'd like to go back to several points to which I alluded earlier. One of those involves the idea of what might be called local or homegrown research. I am certain that the avid researcher would fault me for even using the word research in this connection. Nevertheless, the idea which I recommend to you is this: When an in-service program, whether it is a one day shot or an extended program, is completed, let the participants evaluate it. We have done this over a period of time with good results which doesn't necessarily mean that every program was good but rather that a track record is established so that there is a good sense of what to do as new programs are planned. We also found that there was a continuing solid base for in-service programming despite the fact that a few critics claimed that we wrote questions to trick teachers into saying that they found the in-service programs to be helpful.

I would be remiss to omit a reference to the most critical aspect of planning your in-service programs. Take the results of surveys and evaluations following in-service and let all the participants be aware of them and then let a representative committee or council, call it whatever you wish, be involved in the interpretation of the evaluations and the planning of future in-service programs. I have every confidence that this procedure will generate a sound, teacher supported, approach to in-service activities.

This talk of teacher involvement in in-service quickly evokes some thoughts about teacher centers. This too would be a topic for a full clinic session and I do not wish to enumerate the pros and cons of the idea. Rather, I would simply like to share an admonition that all administrators and board members had best track what is happening with great care. Here's why.

The Government Union Critique (Volume Two, No. 10, 3/28/80) states "Teacher unions largely control the 100 federally funded centers congress created to train teachers." In a survey of 88 centers, it was found that only 20 select the teacher representative majority by teacher elections at large or through school by school elections. Again, I don't mean that teacher unions never address instructional issues, but I do not believe that the control should reside with the teachers' union.

The title of this clinic is In-service That Improves Instruction. For a moment, let's turn that title into a question and ask, "Can in-service improve instruction?" I fear that if we were pressed to defend all in-service expenditures by research that demonstrates a clear and certain relationship between in-service and the improvement of instruction which would ultimately show in an increase of learning, we would have a most difficult time. Few districts can afford a staff and research which would probably be required to prove the point beyond question. We have a big proglem with this question too in that so much of what we do in education is bound up in terms of input measure rather than output measure. How good is your high school library? If you look at how it is evaluated by the library accrediting associations, you find an absence of the really tough questions about how staff and pupils are affected. What you find are series of questions about input: How many seats does it have? How many books do you have? What's the budget for periodicals? What's the training of the staff? None of those questions give any assurance about outcomes. However, I think with experience we gain assurance about the significance of our efforts in in-service. If you have the capacity for studious research, by all means, it should be utilized but there is no case for slackening or abandonment of effort solely for the want of conclusive research. Research sometimes disproves our assumptions and

experience but often it proves what we have already learned through the trial and error method. And there is no reason to be apologetic about that method. It is operative in every human enterprise.

Now, it's time to deliver the guarantee I promised. There is one sure way to avoid an unsatisfactory in-service experience: NEVER PARTICIPATE IN ANY! Don't aatend conventions, even in San Francisco. Don't bother with in-service programs in your district. Don't read a book or journal. Don;t do anything! As ridiculous as this thought seems, I introduce it because I have been concerned about a too common hypercritical attitude about in-service programs. True - there is some basis in fact for negative sentiments. However, there must be a recognition that we cannot "bat a thousand" and there must be a willingness to endure some marginal, even some bad, programs to ever experience the high points, and yes, the excitement of one of those rare but special opportunities than in-service can deliver. And frankly, if you have never experienced the latter, you ought to begin an examination of your own attitudes.

As I close, I'd like to thank you for being here this morning and express with all sincerity the hope that I have given you a few thoughts on enhancing the value and productivity of your in-service programs. If I have failed to do so, perhaps it is because you are already way ahead in the game and maybe then at least I have given you some assurance and conviction that you are on the right path. With that, I'd like to leave you with two questions.

Having already indicated that good in-service is costly, not only in the dollars it takes to support good activities and programs, but also in terms of precious time away from the task at hand, we must think carefully about how we use those resources, dollars and precious time, to be reasonably confident that we are expending them for a greater good. In that spirit,

my questions are these: How much in-service can we afford? How much can we not afford?

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April 9, 1980